

Faith

Every endeavor begins with faith: a trip, new business venture, marriage, university education, purchase of a car or house, belief in God, etc. Faith that one has a chance of success always precedes the endeavor and later one gets the knowledge that the endeavor was either a success or failure. One may assume that knowledge must precede faith. But, the fact is that first one has faith and then knowledge follows as one has practical experience of the endeavor. Faith is defined as strong or unshakeable belief and trust in something sublime.



Faith Precedes Knowledge

An example of faith preceding knowledge is the act of purchasing an airline ticket. At the point of purchase one does not have knowledge that the plane will land safely at the destination. The purchase of the ticket is an act of faith that implies one trusts the airline, its pilots and crew to safely navigate the airplane. Only when the airplane lands at the destination does one have knowledge that the plane did land safely, which validates his initial faith. The attempt to have knowledge before developing faith is no guarantee of success. A friend of mine studied a certain company and its stock performance for one year. At the end of his exhaustive study he was convinced that the company's stock was undervalued. He was also convinced that the company had excellent scope for growth and increase of market share in the near future. With these convictions based on his studies and knowledge of the company's past performance, its management, its competitors and other relevant facts, he decided to purchase \$ 2 million dollars' worth of stock in that company with the expectation that he would make a considerable profit in the next six to 12 months. But, he was shocked to see that the company's stock tanked only two weeks after he purchased it. Factors unbeknownst to him and beyond his control caused the stock to lose considerable value in a short period of time.



Outcome of a stock market is beyond the control of individuals

In the examples cited above, faith was placed in an airline ticket and the expectation that a company's stock price would increase. The outcomes of both were dependent on circumstances that were beyond the control of the individuals. My friend who spent a year studying his particular stock was convinced that there was very little risk buying the stock. He was confident and had faith he would succeed. But in the material world "trust no future however bright for all human beings hang on a slender thread and the strongest fall with a sudden crash." In the material world there will always be changes that are not

predictable and controlled. Thus, there is an element of uncertainty that causes anxiety for the outcome.

Faith in God can be attained by honest observation of nature and oneself

Lord Krishna indicates that He pervades and supports the entire universe. With this in mind, it is possible by careful observation of nature and oneself to perceive the presence of God by the different manifestations of His omnipotent mystical powers, and by our personal psychological development in spiritual life.



The following Vedic history of the saint Narada Muni illustrates this important point.

One day Narada Muni was on his way to visit the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Narayana (a plenary expansion of Lord Krishna). He met a Brahmin priest who requested him to question the Lord when he would attain salvation from birth and death. Narada agreed and continued. He encountered a humble shoemaker who was sitting under a banyan tree repairing shoes. The shoemaker also requested Narada to ask the Lord when he would attain liberation from birth and death and return to the spiritual world to be with the Lord.

Narada reached the spiritual world, Vaikuntha. He asked the Lord about the Brahmana and the shoemaker. The Lord replied that the Brahmana would remain in the cycle of repeated birth and death for a very long time. The shoemaker, however, would return to the Lord at the end of his present life. Narada Muni was perplexed by the Lord's answer. The Brahmana was a learned Vedic scholar who performed Vedic ritualistic sacrifices. He had a large following of disciples and admirers. The shoemaker was a humble worker with very little formal education. He spent his entire day repairing shoes made of animal hides. His trade was considered very lowly. It did not seem plausible that the Brahmana priest would remain in the cycle of birth and death indefinitely and the lowly shoemaker would be liberated in this life.

Narada asked the Lord how was it possible the shoemaker would be liberated and the Brahmana remain in the material world? Narayana replied you will understand. "If they ask you what I was doing when you saw me, tell them I was passing an elephant through the eye of a small sewing needle."

On his return to the earth, Narada met the Brahmana first. He inquired from Narada if this was indeed his last birth in the material world. Narada replied that the Brahmana would stay in the material world and undergo many births and deaths. The Brahmana was visibly upset.

"Did you see the Lord? What was He doing," asked the Brahmana? Narada answered that the Lord was passing an elephant through the eye of a needle. The Brahmana snapped back, "I don't believe your fairy tales!" Narada understood that the Brahmana was not really a man of faith. He was an academic but not a genuine devotee of the Lord.

Narada approached the shoemaker, who was patiently repairing shoes. On seeing the saint, the shoemaker stood up with respect and then bowed down and touched his head to the feet of Narada. He then offered a seat to the saint and gave him water and asked, "Have you seen my Lord Narayana, please describe what He was doing?" Narada replied, "He was threading an elephant through the eye of a needle." The shoemaker began to shed tears and said, "My Lord is all powerful. He can do anything at His sweet will."

Narada was astonished. He asked, "Do you really believe the Lord can pass an elephant through the eye of a needle?" "I am absolutely sure," said the shoemaker. "The Lord is all powerful. He can perform miracles." Narada was curious to know why the shoemaker was so sure of the Lord's prowess. He asked the humble man, "How he could be so sure?"

"My dear Narada, every day I work under the shade of this banyan tree," said the shoemaker. "In season, so many seeds spread over the ground. Look, here is one. The seed is small. Yet, My Lord puts so much power in this little seed that a gigantic tree will grow from it. If the Lord can put a huge tree in this little seed, then it is not difficult to believe He can pass an elephant through the eye of a needle!"

Narada was impressed by the logic and reason of the observant shoemaker, whose trust in the infinite power of the Lord was not based on blind faith. It was the result of careful observation of nature which abounds in testaments of the Lord's power and glory.

According to the influence of the modes of nature one develops a particular faith

Under the influence of the modes of nature, one evolves three kinds of faith – in goodness, in passion, or in ignorance. As long as one associates with the modes of nature, his mentality is shrouded by the contamination of misconception, false attachment, and lust for sense gratification. The different degrees of contamination are ignorance, passion, and goodness. Those influenced by ignorance put their faith in ghosts and spirits; by passion one has faith in demons or any powerful man; by goodness one worships demigods with faith.

Only those persons who have risen to a position transcendental to the three modes of nature place their faith in the Supreme Personality of Godhead. It is stated in the Srimad Bhagavatam (4.3.23) that a person situated in transcendental goodness worships Lord Krishna (the son of Vasudeva and Devaki). Rising above the influence of the modes of nature is possible only by the practice of pure devotion to Lord Krishna who is never affected by the modes. The Lord says, "Know that all states of being – be they of goodness, passion or ignorance – are manifested by my energy. I am, in one sense, everything, but I am independent. I am not under the modes of material nature, for them, on the contrary, are within me."

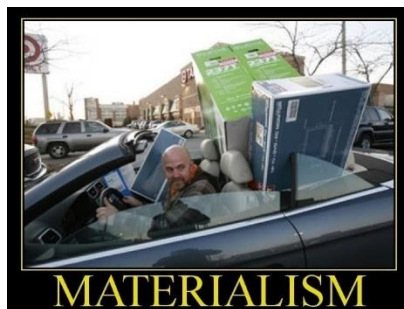
The Lord is the origin and controller of the modes of nature. He is above the modes and their influence. All living entities in the material world remain influenced by the modes as long as they are rebellious against the Lord. "The mode of goodness conditions one to happiness, passion conditions him to the fruits of action, and ignorance to madness." (BG 14.9) But as soon as they surrender to the will of the Lord by regulated devotional service, they become free. Lord Krishna affirms this. "This divine energy of mine, consisting of the three modes of material nature, is difficult to overcome. But those who have surrendered unto me can easily cross beyond it." (BG 7.14)

It is by uninterrupted service to Lord Krishna that one is released from entanglement by the modes of nature. "One who engages in full devotional service, unfailing in all circumstances, at once transcends the modes of material nature and thus comes to the level of Brahman." (BG 14.26) The level of Brahman means one is freed from the influence of the three modes of nature.

Picture represent Materialistic outlook leads to anxiety. Real mode of goodness is so that man can engage in the service of God without any impediment.

Faith in material things will cause anxiety

Ultimately, everyone is destined to fail in this temporary, material world due to the inevitable cycle of birth, old age, disease and death. People feel anxiety because they instinctively desire to be immortal, but all are trapped in a temporary and constantly changing material body. The inevitable course of human life from birth to death causes continual anxiety. Modern scientists declare that they will one day conquer over old age, disease and death. But until now, these claims have not materialized.



Materialistic outlook leads to anxiety

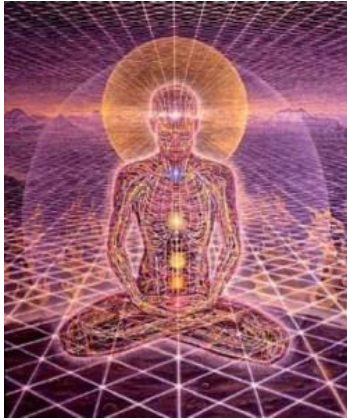
The mind that is always fearful, anxious and uncertain about the future will remain unsteady and incapable of focusing on higher order thoughts of self-realization and God consciousness. Disturbance of the mind is due to want of an ultimate goal. Material goals may be achieved with great effort and skill, but the person of merit and his accomplishments will eventually disappear and be forgotten. The ultimate goal of life is achieved by understanding one's relationship with Krishna and working as a sincere servant of the Lord.

Ignoring self-realization one becomes fearful and anxious

Immortality is the natural quality of the soul, which is perceived by the presence of consciousness throughout the material body. It is false attachment to the body that keeps the soul chained to the unnecessary cycle of birth and death. Due to attachment to the body a person becomes attached to the pursuit of sense gratification and abandons any attempt for self-realization. Krishna instructs his friend and disciple Arjuna about the difference between the soul and the body. He says, "Those who are seers of the truth have concluded that of the nonexistent [the material body] there is no endurance and of the eternal [the soul] there is no change. This they have concluded by studying the nature of both." (BG 2.16)

"That which pervades the entire body (consciousness) you should know to be indestructible. No one is able to destroy that imperishable soul." (BG 2.17) Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada explains, "There is no endurance of the changing body. That the body is changing every moment by the actions and reactions of the different cells is admitted by modern medical science; and thus growth and old age are

taking place in the body. But the spirit soul exists permanently, remaining the same despite all changes of the body and the mind. That is the difference between matter and spirit. By nature, the body is ever changing, and the soul is eternal.” (BG purport to 2.16)



The Soul is central and the subtle body and gross body cover it as progressive layers

By transferring attachment from the temporary body to the eternal soul and its eternal relationship to God (Krishna), the disturbed mind can achieve a peaceful state. One who lives without a relationship with Krishna is always distressed and without peace. This is confirmed in the Srimad Bhagavatam, “Fear arises when a living entity misidentifies himself as the material body because of absorption in the external, illusory energy of the Lord. When the living entity thus turns away from the Supreme Lord, he also forgets his own constitutional position as a servant of the Lord. This bewildering, fearful condition is affected by the potency of illusion, called Maya. Therefore, an intelligent person should engage unflinchingly in the unalloyed devotional service of the Lord, under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master, whom he should accept as his worshipable deity and as his very life and soul.” (SB 11.2.37)

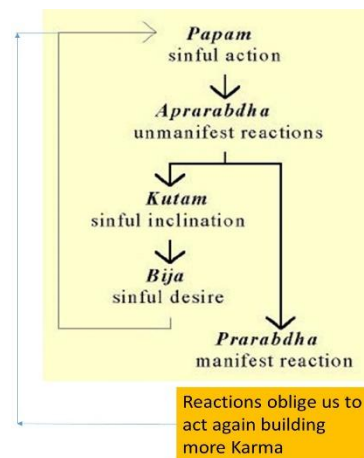
The spiritual master is not God. He is the messenger or representative of God who teaches the disciple how to serve the Lord without any selfish motive or desire. Ignoring such instructions and acting whimsically will lead to entanglement by the three modes of nature and repetition of birth and death.



Body grows, stays, dwindles and dies but soul goes onto next body

Anxiety and fear will exist as long as people act under the influence of the three modes of nature. As a result one becomes preoccupied by the duality of gain and safety, happiness and distress, etc. The many dualities one encounters in life become sources of bondage and bewilderment. Dualities plague a person who does not have the unique fixed goal of serving God purely to please Him and devoid of any material motives and speculative theories.

Entanglement in the cycle of birth and death due to karma (law of action and reaction), time and three modes of nature.



The cycle of Karma without devotion and surrender to Lord

Those who desire profit for sense gratification become entangled in the unending cycle of action and reaction which results in continual disturbances. These troubles are caused by the passage of time, the influence of the modes of nature, and karmic reactions from past activities. The modes of nature influence persons with desires prompted by lust, anger, greed and the hankering for prestige and fame. These cause people with selfish motives to compete with other persons with similar desires.

In such a highly competitive context, conflicting dualities of how to act arise accompanied by anxieties for gain and safety. These are compounded by the passage of time that obliges persons with selfish motives to act.

By learning to tolerate the dualities of life one can become free from anxieties regarding gain and safety. This transcendental position is achieved as one fully matures in the practice of Krishna consciousness and becomes dependent on the good will of Krishna. This is confirmed by Krishna, “The steadily devoted soul attains unadulterated peace because he offers the result of all activities to me; whereas a person who is not in union with the Divine, who is greedy for the fruits of his labor, becomes entangled.” (BG-5.12)

A person can fix the mind on one ultimate goal, which should be to please God by following His revealed instructions in the Holy Scriptures like the Bhagavad-Gita. With the help of a bona fide spiritual master one can learn how to follow God’s instructions correctly and integrally so that the end result is freedom from the cycle of birth and death. With the one goal of God’s pleasure in mind, one escapes the confusion of duality.

In the normal course of materialistic life one is faced with the constant dilemma of having to choose between one option or another and both without a guaranteed outcome. Once a choice is made of one option over the other there will be a result that is either favorable or unfavorable.

A quick example of duality and its consequences is gambling. Let's say one goes to a race track to bet on a horse race. After careful consideration of a group of horses in a race, one chooses a particular horse over others and places a bet. It turns out that the chosen horse loses the race. One laments that he did not choose another horse that he considered before making the final decision. In life, we are always faced with making decisions between one course of action and another. After the decision we encounter good or bad results that cause joy or lamentation. Both outcomes result in consequences that require more actions and reactions. Thus, we are always forced to act and react in a constant cycle. This is the law of karma. Every action we undertake causes a reaction that obliges us to act again. By the law of karma we remain perpetually entangled in the cycle of birth and death.

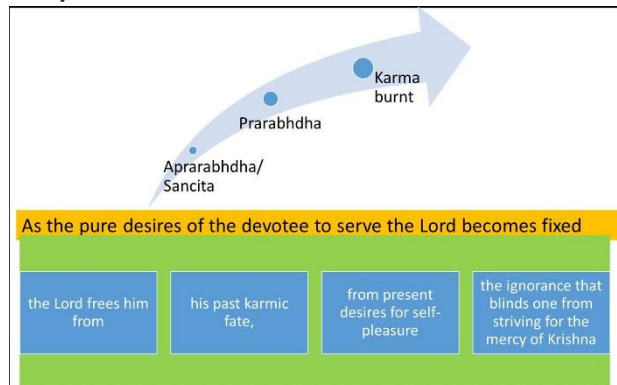
Freedom from karmic reaction

When we choose to serve God without any material motive except to please Him by unselfish service, we escape the entangling effects of karma. Lord Krishna explains this freedom from karma in the Bhagavad-Gita. "By thus engaging in devotional service to the Lord, great sages or devotees free themselves from the results of work in the material world. In this way they become free from the cycle of birth and death and attain the state beyond all miseries [by going back to Godhead]." (BG 2.51)

Transcendental action without any karmic reaction

Many miraculous things happen when a person decides to seriously surrender to Lord Krishna. By virtue of devoting oneself to serving Krishna by strictly following the instructions of a bona fide spiritual master who is a pure devotee, one is freed from the reactions of past karma. Krishna states this, "Persons who have acted piously in previous lives and in this life and whose sinful actions are completely eradicated are freed from the dualities of delusion, and they engage themselves in my service with determination." (BG 7.28) How are the sinful reactions of past activities completely eradicated? This is revealed by Brahma in his prayer called the Brahma Samhita. He says, "I adore Lord Govinda, who burns up to their roots all fruitive activities of those who are imbued with devotion..." (BS 5.54) Lord Krishna gives special dispensation (release from previous karma) to his sincere devotees so that they are free to engage in the service of the Lord without the burden of previous karmic reactions hindering them. As soon as a devotee acts with pure intentions to please Lord Krishna without any other motive for his personal self-indulgence, Krishna blesses him by freeing him of all desires except those to serve the pleasure of the Lord. Gradually as the pure desires of the devotee to serve the Lord becomes fixed the Lord frees him from his past karmic fate, from present desires for self-pleasure, and the ignorance that blinds one from striving for the mercy of Krishna and keeps one engaged in the selfish pursuit of temporary sense gratification.

The cycle of Karma with devotion and surrender to Lord



A person acting steadily in Krishna consciousness is free from the bonds of karma. Because he dedicates all his activities to serve Krishna, he does not receive any of the good or bad effects of his work. The activity of pure devotion to Krishna is called akarma, which means there are no reactions incurred by performance of work in the material world. The determination to steadfastly serve without an expectation of sense gratification makes one immune to all sorts of reactionary consequences resulting from devotional acts meant to please Krishna.

Freedom from karmic reaction is stated by Krishna, “One is understood to be in full knowledge whose every endeavor is devoid of desire for sense gratification. He is said by sages to be a worker for whom the reactions of work have been burned up by the fire of perfect knowledge.” (BG 4.19) The fire of perfect knowledge refers to the conviction that a person maintains that his eternal and constitutional identity is to be the unalloyed servant of the Lord. The knowledge of servitorship to the Lord is compared to fire. Such fire, once lighted can burn up all kinds of reactions to work.

He is no wise man who will quit a certainty for an uncertainty.

Lord Krishna promises multiple times in the Bhagavad-Gita that his devotee can obtain entrance back to the eternal spiritual world. This solemn promise should be taken very seriously. He declares, “For one who always remembers me without deviation, I am easy to obtain, O son of Pritha, because of his constant engagement in devotional service.” (BG 8.14) “Engage your mind always in thinking of me, become my devotee, offer obeisance’s to me and worship Me. Being completely absorbed in me, surely you will come to me.” (BG 9.34) “My dear Arjuna, he who engages in My pure devotional service, free from the contaminations of fruitive activities and mental speculation, he who works for Me, who makes Me the supreme goal of his life, and who is friendly to every living being – he certainly comes to Me.” (BG 11.55) “Always think of me, become my devotee, worship me and offer your homage unto me. Thus you will come to me without fail. I promise you this because you are my very dear friend.” (BG 18.65) “But those who worship Me, giving up all their activities unto Me and being devoted to Me without deviation, engaged in devotional service and always meditating upon Me, having fixed their minds upon Me, O son of Pritha– for them I am the swift deliverer from the ocean of birth and death.” (12. 6-7)

“All these devotees are undoubtedly magnanimous souls, but he who is situated in knowledge of Me I consider to be just like my own self. Being engaged in my transcendental service, he is sure to attain me, the highest and most perfect goal.” (BG 7.18) “After attaining me, the great souls, who are yogis in devotion, never return to this temporary world, which is full of miseries, because they have attained the highest perfection.” (BG 8.15)

In this way you will be freed from bondage to work and its auspicious and inauspicious results. With your mind fixed on me in this principle of renunciation, you will be liberated and come to me.” (BG 9.28) “A person who accepts the path of devotional service is not bereft of the results derived from studying the Vedas, performing sacrifices, undergoing austerities, giving charity or pursuing philosophical and fruitive activities. Simply by performing devotional service, he attains all these, and at the end he reaches the supreme eternal abode.” (BG 8.28)

Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada writes, “Arjuna was born in a saintly royal family. To him also the Lord says, ‘Take to My devotional service and come quickly back to Godhead, back home.’ No one should remain in this temporary world, full as it is with miseries. Everyone should attach himself to the bosom of the Supreme Personality of Godhead so that he can be eternally happy. The devotional service

of the Supreme Lord is the only process by which all problems of all classes of men can be solved. Everyone should therefore take to Krishna Consciousness and make his life perfect.” (BG 9.33 purport) Having faith in material things and materialistic people is always replete with uncertainty as far as the outcome is concerned. But placing our faith on Lord Krishna’s promise is a different thing. It is certain and guaranteed by the Lord Himself and validated by many saints of the past. The Lord tells Arjuna, “The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: Again I shall declare to you this supreme wisdom, the best of all knowledge, knowing which all the sages have attained the supreme perfection.” (BG 14.1)

“All the liberated souls in ancient times acted with this understanding of my transcendental nature. Therefore you should perform your duty, following in their footsteps.” (BG 4.15) Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to act in Krishna consciousness as the great sages before him. The Lord is referring to the demigod of the sun, Vivasvan, who learned the philosophy of Krishna consciousness from Lord Krishna. “The Personality of Godhead, Lord Sri Krishna, said: I instructed this imperishable science of yoga to the sun-god, Vivasvan, and Vivasvan instructed it to Manu, the father of mankind, and Manu in turn instructed it to Ikṣvaku.” (BG 4.1) This is a description of the history of the Bhagavad-Gita that was first spoken by the Lord to the sun-god.

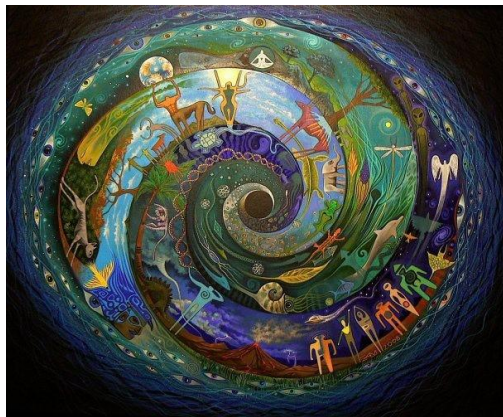
All the great sages of the past who learned this spiritual science attained perfection. Lord Krishna explains the same Bhagavad-Gita to Arjuna so that he can also attain perfection as the great sages of the past. Perfection means coming to the standard of pure devotional service to the Lord by which one can attain freedom from the three factors that bind the living entity to the cycle of birth and death: time, the three modes of material nature, and karma. The only real certainty in the material world is the promise Lord Krishna makes that anyone who serves Him with love and devotion will be saved from the cycle of birth and death and go back to the Lord’s eternal spiritual abode. Putting our faith in the Lord’s promise is the best decision we can make. “Therefore, Arjuna, you should always think of me in the form of Krishna and at the same time carry out your prescribed duty of fighting. With your activities dedicated to me and your mind and intelligence fixed on me, you will attain me without doubt.” (BG 8.7) “He who meditates on me as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, his mind constantly engaged in remembering me, undeviated from the path, he, O Pārtha, is sure to reach me.” (BG 8.8)

“One who, at the time of death, fixes his life air between the eyebrows and, by the strength of yoga, with an undeviating mind, engages himself in remembering the Supreme Lord in full devotion, will certainly attain to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” (BG 8.10) “This divine energy of mine, consisting of the three modes of material nature, is difficult to overcome. But those who have surrendered unto me can easily cross beyond it.” (BG 7.14) “O Arjuna, those who take shelter of me, though they be of lower birth - women, vaiśyas (businessmen), sudras (day laborers) - can attain the supreme destination.” Hope against hope by continually putting our faith in material things and hoping always for positive outcomes, we are reduced to hope against hope.

We hope something favorable will happen, although we know it is not likely. Such expectation keeps us in the unending cycle of birth and death because we do not attempt to seriously search out the truth, but cling to a flimsy hope of material success. How can there be material success when we are all destined to get old, sick, and die. Scientists and plastic surgeons give false hopes that they can slow down the process of aging, prolong life and eventually find a way to attain immortality. Just as a drowning man will grab at straws to save his life, so do uneducated persons believe the empty promises of anti-aging fraudsters. But, in the back of their minds, they know that they will inevitably lose all their

cherished possessions including the body. They are always anxious and worried about the future and cannot have peace of mind.

Fate the body each person receives at birth is determined by the actions performed in a previous life (karma) and the unfulfilled desires one has at the point of death (consciousness). This is explained in the Bhagavad-Gita: "The living entity in the material world carries his different conceptions of life from one body to another, as the air carries aromas. Thus he takes one kind of body and again quits it to take another." (BG 15.8) The thoughts that preoccupy one's mind during the course of life accumulate to influence one's thoughts at the critical moment of death. In this way, the consciousness one develops through his thoughts, desires, actions, and attachments determine the body and fate of the next life. "Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, O son of Kunti (Arjuna), that state he will attain without fail." (BG 8.6)



Burden of previous karmic reactions keep us in a loop of more Karma - let's break the cycle

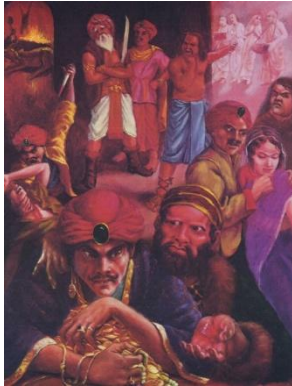
After death there is no guarantee we will take rebirth as a human being

After death, there is no guarantee that we will be reborn as a human being. We are most fortunate to have a human body in this life. If we ignore the destiny of human life, which is to develop pure love and devotion to God, we may receive an animal, insect, or even lower body such as a microbe in the next life and be forced to progress slowly through the process of birth and death to come back again to a human form. There are 8.4 million species of life that we can be born into according to our karma. Animals and lower forms of life do not have limited free will by which they can merit emancipation. It is only in the human form that we have a chance for self-realization and liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The human being must choose voluntarily to serve God and dedicate his energy, thoughts, and desires to practically follow the instructions of the Lord. This choice is reaffirmed every minute of each day by regularly hearing and chanting the names of God and associating with sincere devotees who practice the same with determination and faith.

The mind is the best friend or worst enemy.

Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna, "For him who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends; but for one who has failed to do so, his mind will remain the greatest enemy." (BG 6.6) The purpose of yoga practice is to help one deliver himself with the help of the mind, not degrade oneself. One can do this by drawing the mind away from attachment to temporary sense objects. The pure soul remains mired in the material world because the mind is influenced by the false ego which desires to lord it over

material nature by dominating and exploiting the resources of nature for selfish interest. The mind and the senses should be trained to not be attracted by the transitory enticements of material nature.



We act out of lust for something and resultant reactions or Karma manifests over time

Sex, intoxication, meat-eating, gambling, financial and philosophical speculation are attractions of material nature that are glorified by publicity and secular education. One must learn the pitfalls of these false pursuits. Then one can be saved from being conditioned by the three modes of material nature that oblige the living entity to remain in the cycle of repeated birth and death. The more one is attracted by sense objects, the more one becomes entangled in material existence. The best and sure way to be disentangled is by always engaging the mind in Krishna conscious or God-centered activities.

Without control of the mind, the yoga practitioner will simply demonstrate different postures and breathing exercises without making any tangible progress in the pursuit of self-realization. It is simply useless work and a waste of time without the added value of devotional service to the Lord. The purpose of human life is spoiled when one fails to control the mind. If the mind remains an unconquered enemy, one is reduced to being the servant of degrading emotional states of lust, anger, greed, illusion, madness, and envy. By control of the mind, one voluntarily follows the superior dictation of God who is present in the heart as the Supersoul. The goal of yoga practice is to become conscious of the presence of God within one's heart and consequently strictly follow His dictation.

The dictation of The Lord comes through the disciplic succession from the bona fide spiritual master. In material life, the conditioned souls are perplexed about the purpose of life and how to attain it. A person who is practicing Krishna consciousness under proper guidance can act appropriately to make tangible spiritual advancement because Krishna may communicate to him innately and the devotee has instinctual thoughts either validated or nullified by the spiritual master. Thus, the bona fide spiritual master's order should be taken as the prime duty of life. If one accepts a bona fide spiritual master and acts according to his direction, then one's perfection of life in Krishna consciousness is guaranteed. Lord Krishna explains, "If you become conscious of me, you will pass over all the obstacles of conditional life by my grace. If, however, you do not work in such consciousness but act through false ego, not hearing me, you will be lost." (BG 18.58) Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada eloquently explains this verse as follows.

"A person in full Krishna consciousness is not unduly anxious about executing the duties of his existence. The foolish cannot understand this great freedom from all anxiety. For one who acts in Krishna consciousness, Lord Krishna becomes the most intimate friend. He always looks after His friend's comfort, and He gives Himself to His friend, who is so devotedly engaged working twenty-four hours a day to please the Lord. Therefore, no one should be carried away by the false ego of the bodily concept

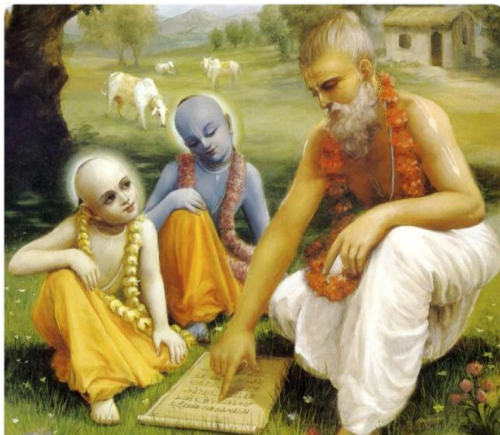
of life. One should not falsely think himself independent of the laws of material nature or free to act. He is already under strict material laws. But as soon as he acts in Krishna consciousness, he is liberated, free from the material perplexities. One should note very carefully that one who is not active in Krishna consciousness is losing himself in the material whirlpool, in the ocean of birth and death. No conditioned soul actually knows what is to be done and what is not to be done, but a person who acts in Krishna consciousness is free to act because everything is prompted by Krishna from within and confirmed by the spiritual master.” (BG 18.58)

Three levels of spiritual knowledge

Spiritual knowledge is not learned. It is remembered because the eternal soul has been trapped for many births and deaths in the material world and has transmigrated through the 8.4 million different species of life. It is only in the human form that self-realization can be most effectively achieved by an awakening of memory. Innate knowledge is a fact. For example, would anyone deny being with his or her mother at the moment of birth? Of course not! But can anyone remember coming out of the mother’s womb at birth? Again the answer is no. Yet, no one would deny being with his mother at birth. Therefore, there is innate knowledge of the experience, but one cannot remember it. It is possible to access this innate knowledge by a two pronged method: regularly engaging in devotional service which includes eating sanctified food (prasadam – food offered first to Lord Krishna with love and devotion and offered back by the Lord as His mercy), and chanting at least sixteen good rounds of japa (recitation of the holy mantra Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare). Both devotional activities are optimally performed in the association of rightfully situated devotees who are strictly practicing the principles of Bhakti yoga under the tutelage of bonafide spiritual masters, instructing and initiating gurus.

The result of following the above is gradual development of faith that simply by acting in Krishna consciousness one can attain the highest perfection of human life. To successfully receive transcendental knowledge given in the Bhagavad-Gita by Lord Krishna, one needs to have faith that Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Faith is gradually developed in the association of people who have unflinching faith just as an iron bar becomes fire by staying in touch with fire for a long time. In the association of good devotees and the bona fide spiritual masters, one develops a submissive state of mind. Without this submissive mindset it is very difficult to understand Bhagavad-Gita. It will remain a mystery for the unsubmissive. Lord Krishna says, “To those who are constantly devoted to me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to me.” (BG 10.10) Spiritual knowledge is gifted by revelation. Before studying Bhagavad Gita, one should at least theoretically accept Lord Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. With such a submissive attitude one can understand the mysteries of Krishna’s teaching.

Spiritual master teaches us to serve lord without selfish motive or desire



By following this simple life style, one becomes quickly free of the influence of ignorance and passion and comes to the level of goodness, which is the proper platform from which one can begin to learn spiritual knowledge. The influence of passion and ignorance (manifested as lust, anger, envy, illusion, madness and greed) are obstacles to cultivating spiritual life and knowledge. They must be purified and replaced by equilibrium and peace of mind, self-control, austerity, cleanliness internally of the mind and externally of the body, tolerance and forgiveness, honesty and straight-forward relations with others, theoretical knowledge of spiritual life (jnana), and realization of this knowledge by practically using it in everyday situations for success in spiritual life.



Steps to identify a real spiritual master

The realized knowledge includes knowledge of the body and the individual soul and the difference between them as the first level. The knowledge of the difference between the individual soul and the Supersoul (God-Krishna), who is present along with the tiny individual soul in the heart of every person and living entity, is the second level of spiritual knowledge. The third level of spiritual knowledge is to know and meet Lord Krishna either in His deity form or in person. He is the origin of both the Supersoul and the individual soul of the living entity. Also He is the origin and maintainer of the entire material nature including all bodies of the different living entities. The three levels comprise realized knowledge (vijñana). Krishna says, "Whoever knows me as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, without doubting, is the knower of everything. He therefore engages himself in full devotional service to Me, O son of Bharata." (BG 15.19) One understands that devotional service (bhakti-yoga) is the means and the end for receiving knowledge of Krishna. How to recognize a bona fide spiritual master.

There are specific qualities that one must recognize in a spiritual master to be reassured that he or she is a bonafide representative of Srila Prabhupada, who is the Founder-Acharya of ISKCON, and the entire disciplic succession beginning from Lord Krishna.

- 1- He must not declare that he is God, nor should he permit his disciples to make such a declaration. He is the humble servant of his bona fide guru in the disciplic succession coming originally from Lord Krishna.
- 2- He must be initiated by a bona fide spiritual master in the authentic Vaishnava disciplic succession beginning from Lord Krishna to Brahma to Narada Muni to Vyasa and continuing through Madhavacarya (the modern proponent of the Brahma sampradaya) to Lord Chaitanya (the incarnation of the Lord) and Bhaktivinode Thakura, Gaura Kishore Babaji, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, and Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada. There are three other Vaishnava disciplic successions: Sri, Rudra, and Kumara. They are all coming originally from Lord Krishna and their modern proponents are Ramanujacarya, Visnuswami, and Nimbarkacarya. The basic tenet of these four disciplic successions (sampradaya) is that Lord Krishna is the Supreme

Personality of Godhead and all living entities are His eternal servants. No one is equal or greater than Lord Krishna.

- 3- He teaches pure bhakti yoga (unconditional love and devotion to Lord Krishna). His teaching is primarily based on the Bhagavad-Gita and the Srimad Bhagavatam Vedic texts. He also takes inspiration from supplemental Vedic texts written by Rupa, Sanatana, and Jiva Goswamis who explain the most sublime principles of pure bhakti-yoga and the highest pinnacle of devotional relationships with Lord Krishna described as santa (neutrality), dasya (serviteurhip), sakya (friendship), vatsalya (parental), and madhurya (conjugal) lilas (pastimes). Pure Bhakti is defined by Srila Rupa Goswami in his Nectar of Devotion, "When first-class devotional service develops, one must be devoid of all material desires, knowledge obtained by monistic philosophy, and fruitive action. The devotee must constantly serve Krishna favorably, as Krishna desires."
- 4- He speaks, acts, and lives by giving a perfect example of how to follow all the rules and regulations of pure bhakti-yoga. His example demonstrates the spirit and letter of the rules and regulations of pure devotion.
- 5- He has no other interest in life except to preach and serve the mission of Srila Prabhupada and his ISKCON organization to spread Krishna consciousness throughout the world for the pleasure of Lord Krishna and the benefit of humanity.
- 6- He has complete control of his faculties as described in the following verse from the Nectar of Instruction by Srila Rupa Goswami. "A sober person who can tolerate the urge to speak, the mind's demands, the actions of anger and the urges of the tongue, belly and genitals is qualified to make disciples all over the world."
- 7- There no hint of lust, anger (based on frustrated material desires), greed, illusion, madness, and envy in his behavior. He does not lament for material things he has lost, nor does he hanker for material things he lacks. He is equally disposed toward every living entity by relating to others as he would want them to relate to him.
- 8- He considers His Divine Grace A.C. Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada as his ultimate siksa guru (instructing spiritual master). He follows the standards and teaching of Srila Prabhupada as his life and soul.
- 9- His only desire is to serve the mission of Krishna Consciousness as described by Lord Chaitanya in His Siksamrtam prayers. "O almighty Lord, I have no desire to accumulate wealth, nor do I desire beautiful women, nor do I want any number of followers. I only want your causeless devotional service birth after birth."
- 10- He is considered a liberated soul even in this world because he knows how to use everything in the service of Lord Krishna as described by the following verse from the Nectar of Devotion of Srila Rupa Goswami, "A person acting in Krishna consciousness (or, in other words, in the service of Krishna) with his body, mind, intelligence and words is a liberated person even within this material world, although he may be engaged in many so-called material activities."
- 11- The qualification of a spiritual master is that he must have realized the conclusion of the Vedic scriptures by deliberation and arguments and thus be able to convince others of these conclusions. Sincere devotees who have taken complete shelter of Lord Krishna, leaving aside all material considerations, are qualified to become bona fide spiritual masters. Everyone should try to find such a bona fide spiritual master in order to fulfill the mission of life, which is

to purify his consciousness, engage wholeheartedly in the devotional service of Krishna, and develop pure love of the Lord.

- 12- He teaches Krishna consciousness by repeating correctly the Vedic knowledge that he has realized by hearing the Bhagavad-Gita and Srimad Bhagavatam with the commentary of his Divine Grace A.C. Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada, the Founder-Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). The more accurately he can repeat in context the original words of Lord Krishna and the commentary of the Founder-Acharya Srila Prabhupada, the more he is a qualified guru.

The above is not an exhaustive list of qualifications for a bona fide guru. It gives a basic understanding of the fundamental points.

Attaining peace of mind

The cause of repeated birth and death is the mind which is cluttered with unending material desires for sensual enjoyment in this temporary world. It is only in the human form of life that there is a chance to control the mind. This is possible by continual cultivation of Krishna consciousness, which means engaging the mind and senses in the service of Krishna. The idle mind is the devil's workshop. When the mind is fully engaged in the service of God, it becomes the vehicle that drives us to the ultimate destination of human life: total emancipation from the cycle of birth and death and entry into the eternal, spiritual world.

Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna, "A person who is not disturbed by the incessant flow of (material) desires – that enter like rivers into the ocean, which is ever being filled but is always still - can alone achieve peace, and not the man who strives to satisfy such desires." "A person who has given up all desire for sense gratification, who lives free from (material) desires, who has given up all sense of proprietorship and is devoid of false ego – he alone can attain peace." (BG 2.70-71) Becoming free of material desires is achieved by replacing those desires with spiritual desires to serve and please God. It is not possible to remain without any desires.



Material Sense enjoyment leads to duality

Desire is born of interactions of the five great elements of matter – earth, water, fire, air, ether (space). It is impossible to stop the interactions of these five great elements. Therefore, desires will naturally arise in the mind. It is, however, possible to change the quality of desires by accepting that everything material and spiritual is owned and controlled by God. By educating oneself in this way, one does not falsely claim proprietorship over anything. The proof of self-realization is the constant endeavor by the enlightened person to correctly use everything in his possession in the service of God and for the

welfare of all. Every living entity is an eternal soul and an infinitesimal part and parcel of Krishna. Krishna is the Supreme Soul and all living entities emanate from Him. They are qualitatively one, but quantitatively different from the Lord. Krishna is the ultimate beneficiary of all services and sacrifices, He is the supreme proprietor of everything, and He is the ultimate best friend of the living entity because He is situated in the heart of all beings as the Supersoul. This understanding of Krishna consciousness is the basic principle that engenders real and everlasting peace in the mind of the sincere devotee of the Lord.

Lust keeps the mind in a constant state of disturbance

A person becomes peaceful in mind and body when the quality of desire changes from material to spiritual. Material desires for sense gratification put the mind in a restless state of hankering for things to have and lamenting for things one has lost. Hankering and lamenting for material things never ends for the materialists.



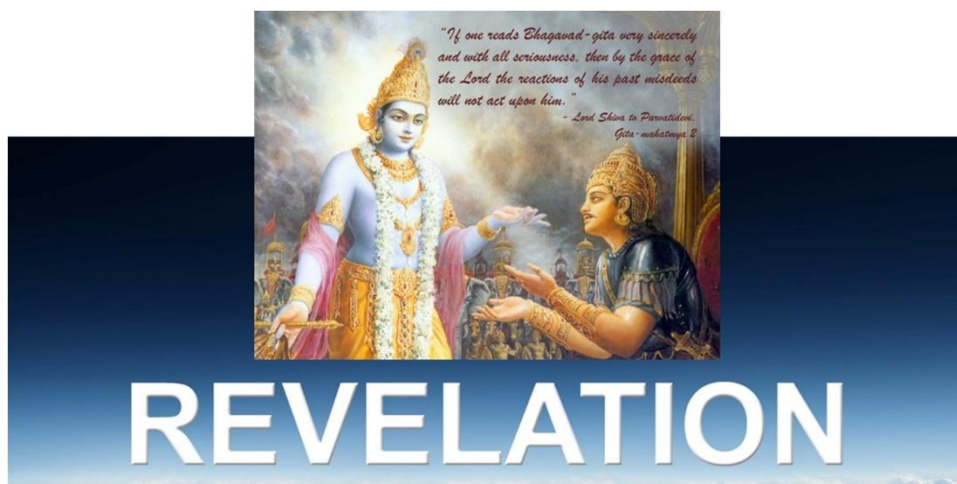
Freeing from Karmic bondage

Attachment to the carnal body prompts many desires in the mind of a materialistically inclined person. The body with its impulsive senses demands sense gratification, which is characterized as follows: “Thus the wise living entities pure consciousness becomes covered by his eternal enemy in the form of lust, which is never satisfied and which burns like fire.” (BG 3.39) Lust is the obsessive desire to exploit people and things for personal sense enjoyment. When one experiences lusty desires, the consciousness is covered by a hazy shroud that obscures the correct perception of reality. Just as fire is never extinguished by feeding it fuel, similarly lust can never be satisfied by any amount of sense enjoyment. In the association of materialistic people, one develops the propensity for lust and desire for dominating the resources of material nature. One’s mind becomes preoccupied by sense gratification and seeks out ever more stimulating sensual experiences.

This state of mind obsessed with domination becomes the greatest enemy of the conditioned soul. It pushes him to commit more and more risky and irresponsible acts. The result is entanglement in the net of karmic reactions that hopelessly bind one to the cycle of birth and death. The spiritual master can free one from hopelessness and karmic bondage. The Lord is the supreme spiritual master, and the bona fide representative of the Supreme Lord is also a spiritual master. The Lord from within enlightens the devotees. The Lord’s representative, the spiritual master, enlightens from without. Krishna affirms, “To show them (devotees) mercy, I, dwelling in their hearts, destroy with the shining lamp of knowledge the darkness born of ignorance.” (BG 10.11) The instructions given by Lord Krishna to His devotee Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita are the quintessential essence of knowledge for the conditioned living entity to free

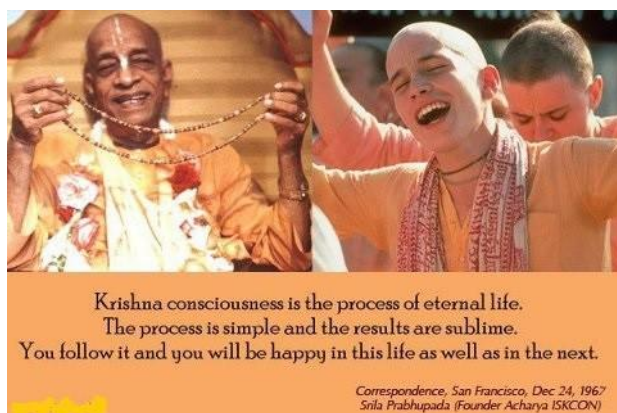
himself from the bondage of birth and death. The perfection of knowledge is to act according to the teachings of Krishna. The correct understanding of Krishna's teaching and how to practically follow them comes through the disciplic succession and is delivered by the current bona fide spiritual master. Therefore the spiritual master's guidance and instruction should be taken as one's duty in life. If one is fortunate enough to contact a bona fide spiritual master and act according to his direction, then one's perfection of life in Krishna consciousness is guaranteed.

Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada comments, "A person in full Krishna consciousness is not unduly anxious about executing the duties of his existence. The foolish cannot understand this great freedom from all anxiety. For one who acts in Krishna consciousness, Lord Krishna becomes the most intimate friend. He always looks after His friend's comfort, and He gives Himself to His friend, who is so devotedly engaged working twenty-four hours a day to please the Lord. Therefore, no one should be carried away by the false ego of the bodily concept of life. One should not falsely think himself independent of the laws of material nature or free to act. He is already under strict material laws. But as soon as he acts in Krishna consciousness, he is liberated, free from the material perplexities. One should note very carefully that one who is not active in Krishna Consciousness is losing himself in the material whirlpool, in the ocean of birth and death. No conditioned soul actually knows what is to be done and what is not to be done, but a person who acts in Krishna consciousness is free to act because everything is prompted by Krishna from within and confirmed by the spiritual master." (BG 18.58 - in the purport)



Revelation from Lord Krishna

Faith in Lord Krishna and the bona fide Spiritual Master One who has unflinching devotion for the Supreme Lord and is directed by the spiritual master, in whom he has similar unflinching faith, can see the Supreme Personality of Godhead by revelation. One cannot understand Krishna by mental speculation. For one who does not take personal training under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master, it is impossible to even begin to understand Krishna. Other processes of yoga may be helpful for mind control, but they cannot be successful in understanding Lord Krishna unless one takes to pure devotional service under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master who is a genuine Vaishnava, a Krishna devotee. Lord Krishna confirms this fact. "And of all yogis, the one with great faith who always abides in me, thinks of me within himself and renders transcendental loving service to me – he is the most intimately united with me in yoga and is the highest of all. That is my opinion." (BG 6.47)



Spiritual Master

“My dear Arjuna, only by undivided devotional service can I be understood as I am, standing before you, and can thus be seen directly. Only in this way can you enter into the mysteries of my understanding.” (BG 11.54) Engagement in bhakti-yoga opens up a different pathway to receiving knowledge. Generally one tries to acquire knowledge by study. The Vedic method of knowledge is based on revelation as expressed above. Lord Krishna says, “To those who are constantly devoted to serving me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to me.” (BG 10.10) When Lord Krishna is pleased by the devotional service of His devotee, He reveals Himself within the heart of the pure devotee. The Lord confirms this when He says, “I am seated in everyone’s heart, and from me come remembrance, knowledge and forgetfulness. By all the Vedas, I am to be known. Indeed, I am the compiler of Vedanta, and I am the knower of the Vedas.” (BG 15.15)



The disciplic succession coming from Krishna

For the devotee who always thinks of Krishna by meditating on His form, pastimes, and instructions, the Lord gives him His special mercy by making Himself easily available to His devotee and protecting him from falling down again to material life. The Lord says, “For one who always remembers me without deviation, I am easy to obtain, O son of Pritha (Arjuna), because of his constant engagement in devotional service.” (BG 8.14) And again He says, “Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear.” (BG 18.66)



All Virtues tested at Death

A pure devotee is *niskama*, which means he has no desire for self-interest. He experiences perfect peace because he has no desire other than to please Lord Krishna through the instructions of his spiritual master. There is a very intimate relationship between the devotee and Krishna as revealed by the following verse: “The devotees are always in my heart, and I am always in the hearts of the devotees. The devotee does not know anything beyond me, and I also cannot forget the devotee. There is a very intimate relationship between me and the pure devotees. Pure devotees in full knowledge are never out of spiritual touch, and therefore they are very much dear to me.” (BG 7.18 in the purport) Putting one’s faith in Lord Krishna and His pure representative acting as a spiritual master is compared to two parallel rails on which a train rolls forward. With the help of Krishna and guru, one makes tangible spiritual progress back to Godhead. Srila Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura instructs us, in his famous prayers for the spiritual master, as follows: “By satisfaction of the spiritual master, the Supreme Personality of Godhead becomes satisfied. And by not satisfying the spiritual master, there is no chance of being promoted to the A pure devotee is *niskama*, which means he has no desire for self-interest. He experiences perfect peace because he has no desire other than to please Lord Krishna through the instructions of his spiritual master. There is a very intimate relationship between the devotee and Krishna as revealed by the following verse: “The devotees are always in my heart, and I am always in the hearts of the devotees. The devotee does not know anything beyond me, and I also cannot forget the devotee. There is a very intimate relationship between me and the pure devotees.

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Krishna emphasizes the importance of pleasing the spiritual master. He says, "Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth." (BG 4.34) The bona fide spiritual master is the external manifestation of Lord Krishna's mercy, which is given in the form of pertinent instructions by which the disciple can free himself from the cycle of birth and death and go back to Krishna. One must approach such a guru with submissiveness, ask important questions, and offer service. Then a favorable relationship develops and the guru will enlighten the disciple with transcendental knowledge by training the initiate how to control the mind and senses.

Engaging the mind and senses in the service of Lord Krishna will gradually purify them. The disciple progresses in services such as hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of the Lord, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words). These nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service. One who has dedicated his life to the service of Krishna through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge. It is stated in the Srimad Bhagavatam, "By rendering devotional service unto the Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna, one immediately acquires causeless knowledge and detachment from the world." (SB 1.2.7) In the prayers to the spiritual master, Srila Vishvanatha Chakravarti writes, "The spiritual master is to be honored as much as the Supreme Lord, because he is the most confidential servitor of the Lord. This is acknowledged in all revealed scriptures and followed by all authorities. Therefore I offer my respectful obeisance's unto the lotus feet of such a spiritual master, who is a bona fide representative of Sri Hari [Krishna]." By pleasing the spiritual master, one pleases Lord Krishna.

All virtues are tested at the moment of death

At the moment of death we are separated from our loved ones and our cherished material belongings. The only thing that we take with us is a mixed bag of good and bad karmic reactions. These unavoidable reactions become our fate in the next life. The thoughts we think of during the course of life accumulate to influence the thoughts we have at the crucial moment of death. The Lord says, "Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, O son of Kunti, that state he will attain without fail." (BG 8.6) Therefore, Lord Krishna gives special importance to training the mind to always think of Him by focusing on His service with love. He says, "One can understand me as I am, as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, only by devotional service. And when one is in full consciousness of me by such devotion, he can enter into the kingdom of God." (BG 18.55) "Though engaged in all kinds of activities, my pure devotee, under my protection, reaches the eternal and imperishable abode by my grace." (BG 18.56) "In all activities just depend upon me and work always under my protection. In such devotional service, be fully conscious of me." (BG 18.57) "One who, at the time of death, fixes his life air between the eyebrows and, by the strength of yoga, with an undeviating mind, engages himself in remembering the Supreme Lord in full devotion, will certainly attain to the Supreme Personality of Godhead." (BG 8.10) At the moment of death the mind must be fixed in devotion to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. One may practice mystic yoga by means of strict breath control to raise the life force and concentrate it between the eyebrows. This practice technically called sat-chakra-yoga, involving meditation on the six chakras, is suggested by Krishna in the last verse abovementioned.

A pure devotee does not practice such yoga, but because he is always engaged in Krishna consciousness through devotional service, at death he can remember the Supreme Personality of Godhead by the Lord's grace. Although Lord Krishna describes the different processes of yoga (karma, jnana, sat-chakra or mystic yoga, and bhakti) for elevation to Krishna consciousness, He recommends bhakti-yoga as the highest or best of all the processes of yoga. Yoga practice means learning how to connect to God. By may do this either by sat-chakra or bhakti-yoga and evolve gradually to the transcendental state of remembering God at the time of death. It is not possible to suddenly remember the Supreme Lord at death unless one has been trained to do it by some yoga system, especially the system of bhakti-yoga. Despite the bodily disturbances one may experience at the moment of death, one should be practiced to keep the mind focused on Krishna.

By constant hearing about the Lord, chanting his names and glories and remembering the Lord's transcendental qualities, one becomes purified of all doubts. At the time of death, the pure devotee can never forget Krishna. This is confirmed by Lord Krishna's own words, "Those in full consciousness of Me, who know me, the Supreme Lord, to be the governing principle of the material manifestation, of the demigods, and of all methods of sacrifice, can understand and know me, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, even at the time of death." (BG 7.30) In the present age of time called Kali-yuga, the age of hypocrisy and quarrel which began 5000 years ago, the most easily performed method of yoga meditation that is sure to lead to ultimate success for the masses of people is Sankirtan – focusing the mind and senses on the congregational chanting of the holy names of God. Lord Chaitanya, the incarnation of Lord Krishna who appeared in the fifteenth century in Bengal, taught the chanting of the Hare Krishna Mahamantra, the great chant for deliverance – Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare. This mantra means "Dear Radharani (the personification of Lord Krishna love and devotion), and dear Krishna (the Supreme Personality of Godhead), and dear Rama (another name of Krishna which means the reservoir of all pleasure), please

protect me so that I can always engage in your transcendental service.” This mantra (man – the mind, tra – deliverance, or the great chant for the deliverance of humanity) is a humble supplication to the Supreme Personality of Godhead to bless one with continual service in devotion to the Lord. There is no hint of a material benefit in this mantra for the supplicant.

In ancient times, the Hare Krishna Mahamantra was recommended in the Brhan-naradiya Purana (38.128) and reaffirmed by Lord Chaitanya in modern times. "In this age of quarrel and hypocrisy, the only means of deliverance is the chanting of the holy name of the Lord. There is no other way. There is no other way. There is no other way." (harer nama harer nama / harer namaiva kevalam / kalau nasty eva nasty eva / nasty eva gatir anyatha) Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada has explained the meaning of this mantra more specifically.

"Kalau means 'in this age.' Nasty eva, nasty eva, nasty eva -- three times nasty eva. Eva means 'certainly,' and nasti means 'not.' 'Certainly not, certainly not, certainly not.' What is that 'certainly not'? One cannot realize oneself by karma. That is the first 'certainly not.' One cannot realize oneself by jnana. That is the second 'certainly not.' One cannot realize oneself by yoga. Certainly not. Kalau. Kalau means 'in this age.' Kalau nasty eva nasty eva nasty eva gatir anyatha. In this age one certainly cannot achieve success by any of these three methods. Then what is the recommended process? Harer nama harer nama harer namaiva kevalam. Simply chant the Hare Krishna Mahamantra. Kevalam means 'only.' Simply chant Hare Krishna. It is the easiest and most sublime process. This is recommended, practical, and authorized. So take it. Accept it in any condition of life. Chant. There is no expenditure, there is no loss. We are not chanting a secret. No. It is open. And by chanting you will cleanse your heart." (Sri Prabhupada lecture entitled, "Attaining Perfection"). By constant chanting of this mantra throughout life, one will purify the mind of all unclean desires and replace them with the beautiful form of Krishna as the ultimate goal of life.

The ultimate act of faith

The ultimate act of faith in spiritual life is to accept every word of Lord Krishna's instructions in the Bhagavad-Gita as truth. This is what Arjuna did. He declared, "...You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the ultimate abode, the purest, the Absolute Truth. You are the eternal, transcendental, original person, the unborn, and the greatest. All the great sages such as Narada, Asita, Devala and Vyasa confirm this truth about you, and now You Yourself are declaring it to me. O Krishna, I totally accept truth all that You have told me. Neither the demigods nor the demons, O Lord, can understand your personality.



Arjuna enquires from Lord Krishna

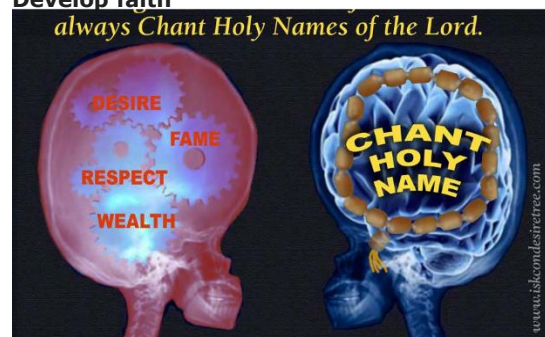
Arjuna was confused about what his duty was in life due to family attachment and his desire for worldly happiness and good reputation. He was overwhelmed by the duality of whether he should fight or not fight. He decided to surrender to Lord Krishna by accepting Him as His spiritual master. He spoke to Krishna as follows. “Now I am confused about my duty and have lost all composure because of miserly weakness. In this condition I am asking you to tell me for certain what is best for me. Now I am your disciple, and a soul surrendered unto you. Please instruct me.” (BG 2.7) After asking Krishna many important questions and hearing His precise answers, Arjuna became convinced that Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead and that he is the Lord’s eternal servant. He made his ultimate affirmation of faith, “... My dear Krishna, O infallible one, my illusion is now gone. I have regained my memory by your mercy. I am now firm and free from doubt and am prepared to act according to your instructions.” The willingness to act according to the order or dictate of the Lord is the constitutional position of the living entity. The disciple is meant for self-discipline. He is disciplined by the order of the Lord coming through his spiritual master. Arjuna was liberated from his confused state of mind and illusory conceptions when he agreed to abide by Krishna’s order.

A genuine student of Bhagavad-Gita becomes enlightened when he follows the same path as Arjuna by accepting Krishna as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. A special relationship develops between the disciple and his spiritual masters, the initiating guru and the instructing gurus, who discipline and teach the disciple. Lord Krishna says, “I envy no one, nor am I partial to anyone. I am equal to all. But whoever renders service unto me in devotion is a friend, is in me, and I am also a friend to him.” (BG 9.29)

Lord Krishna becomes favorably inclined to his devotee and continually shows him his mercy. The reciprocation of the Lord with his devotee is not subject to the laws of karma. It is a transcendental reciprocation of devotion and love. Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada comments, “The pure devotee does not have to worry about the material necessities of life; he need not be anxious, because when he removes the darkness from his heart, everything is provided automatically by the Supreme Lord, who is pleased by the loving devotional service of the devotee. This is the essence of the teachings of Bhagavad-Gita. By studying Bhagavad-Gītā, one can become a soul completely surrendered to the Supreme Lord and engage himself in pure devotional service. As the Lord takes charge, one becomes completely free from all kinds of materialistic endeavors.” (BG 10.11 – purport).

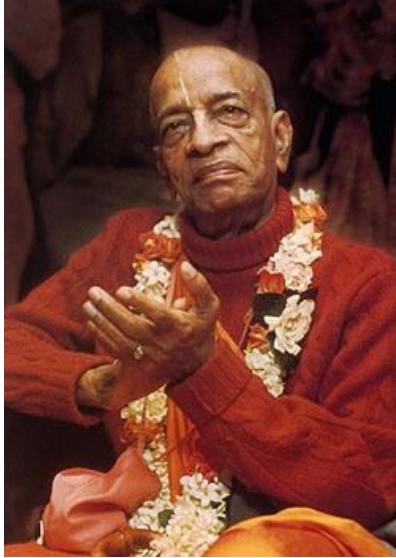
As the reciprocal relationship develops between the devotee and Krishna and his spiritual masters, one’s faith and determination become fixed. This is due to recurring experiences of Krishna’s benevolent mercy and the pertinence of the spiritual masters’ instructions for solving everyday problems of life. Krishna manifests His mercy by inspiring his devotee with the spiritual intelligence to make the right decisions to remain always in Krishna consciousness. The spiritual masters help the devotee to validate or correct his decisions based on scriptural evidence before he acts. Also the spiritual masters help the devotee to evaluate the collateral effects of his action before he undertakes it. Proper spiritual guidance becomes an invaluable asset for the sincere devotee who appreciates relying on Krishna’s good will and his gurus’ protective care and spiritual vision.

Develop faith



Faith is attained by chanting the Mahamantra (Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare/ Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare) and engaging in devotional service offered with love to the Lord which purifies the heart of all inauspicious material desires. By constant engagements in the association of devotees and under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master one can control the mind and senses. Through faith and control of the senses, one can attain transcendental knowledge. The devotee becomes a person of unflinching faith. He is convinced by regulated service and detachment from sensuality that by acting in Krishna consciousness he can attain the highest perfection of spiritual knowledge and love for Krishna. All problems of material life become insignificant. The devotee develops a deep sense of peace and satisfaction by virtue of becoming Krishna conscious. He realizes that the path of pure bhakti is the sure way to attain purity of dedication to Krishna. The desire for liberation pales as he advances in devotion. His overriding desire becomes to remain always in the association of devotees and serve Krishna by following the guidance of his spiritual masters. The devotee renounces the fruits of his actions by dedicating them to Krishna's service. All doubts disappear from his mind by the grace of transcendental knowledge. He is no longer bound by the reactions of work (karma) because he has no selfish desires. His only desire is to please his spiritual masters and Lord Krishna. With such purified consciousness and action he is liberated in this world. He attains unflinching faith in Lord Krishna, his spiritual masters, devotional service, Bhagavad-Gita and Srimad Bhagavatam, and devotees who inspire him to continue on the path of Krishna consciousness.





His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Founder-Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

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Thank you very, very much,

Hare Krishna

Harivilas Das

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